

EDWARD ALLEY

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
AFRO-AMERICANS IN SAN FRANCISCO
PRIOR TO WORLD WAR II

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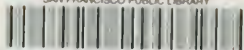
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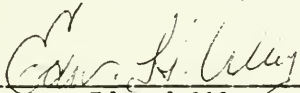
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Edward Alley

Date 12/7/78

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
BLACKS IN SAN FRANCISCO PRIOR TO 1945
Co-Sponsored by:
African-American Historical & Cultural Society
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Interview with Eddie Alley
Place: *San Francisco*
Date: September 19, 1978

Interviewer: Jesse J. Warr
Transcriber: Mary Wells

EA: I was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota, December 19, 1910.

JW: What was your full name at birth?

EA: Edward Henry Alley, Jr. I was a junior. I was named after my father.

JW: And what was your father's occupation at the time?

EA: Well, way back my father was a barber once in Minneapolis, I understand and then he was just a laborer most of his life. He drove...I mean when we moved to Nevada, Winnemucka or some place...we lived in Winnemucka. He drove a bus for a big hotel there and then in San Francisco he had a truck of his own. He was in business for himself loading things and he was one of the first in the country that hauled manure to the rich families. You know, that was a big business. The Italians took over and got rich.

JW: What do you mean hauling to the families. What were they using it for?

EA: Well, he was getting manure and hauling it to the big families in Hillsboro for their gardens and things. And the Italians took that over and they got rich. They're rich off of it. That was a big money deal.

JW: What was it called?

EA: Well, fertilization, I guess.

JW: Were you the oldest son?

EA: I'm the oldest, yes.

JW: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

EA: I have one brother and one sister.

JW: And your brother's name is?

EA: Vernon Alley. My sister passed away a few years ago.

JW: And what was her name?



EA: Winifred.

JW: Did anyone ever tell you about comments made about your birth when you were too small to remember? Anything about how you looked or how the family felt about having a son or anything like that?

EA: No, I don't remember. No.

JW: Were you the oldest grandson on either side?

EA: I guess I am. Yes. My mother and father just had us three kids and I was the oldest.

JW: No, I mean were you the first grandchild in your generation?

EA: You mean my mother's mother, was I her first grandchild? I really don't remember. I'll have to ask my mother. But I don't think so, though. I think her sister, my mother's sister had a child older than me.

JW: What was the house like that you were born in?

EA: I don't remember. See, we left Minneapolis when I was a baby. I don't remember Minneapolis.

JW: About how old were you when you moved?

EA: Oh, gee. Maybe two years old approximately.

JW: Oh, I see. And where did you go from there?

EA: I think we moved to Chicago.

JW: Do you know why?

EA: No, I guess it was always for getting a better job. My father was always looking for a better job and working conditions.

JW: Was he born in Minneapolis?

EA: No, he was born in Chattanooga, Tennessee but he was raised in Pueblo, Colorado.

JW: How did that happen?

EA: I really don't know how my father moved to Pueblo. His father found work there, I presume. My mother is still living and she could answer those questions better than I could. (Chuckle)



JW: What's her name?

EA: My mother's name is Toronto...Well, she's married again now. Her name is Marshall. Toronto Leona Marshall.

JW: Was she named for the city in Canada?

EA: Her maiden name was Toronto Cannaday. So I don't know how she got that name. Her name was Toronto Cannaday. That was her maiden name.

JW: Was she born in Canada?

EA: No, she was born in Iowa. She was born in a little mining town in Iowa. Some little mining town and I've forgotten what section. It's around Oscaloosa.

JW: How did she meet your father?

EA: Gee, I don't know. Would you like to...maybe you could interview her too.

JW: Yes. We'll think about that. Had either one of them gone to college?

EA: No.

JW: What about high school?

EA: My mother went to high school and whether my father finished high school or not I really don't know.

JW: So you moved to Chicago and how long were you there?

EA: Oh, gee. I don't remember how long we were there. We weren't there too long. Then we moved to Nevada. I think we first moved to Reno and then we moved to Winnemucka. See, my brother was born in Winnemucka. Vernon was. And my sister was born in Sparks. So my sister is older than my brother so evidently we moved to Sparks first.

JW: What was going on in Nevada in those days?

EA: Well, I had a grandmother. I had a grandmother and an aunt. They had a ranch in Sparks so they brought us out...I guess they found work for my father and helped us out financially. By moving there, I guess that was the financial asset.

JW: Did your parents ever talk about what the conditions were like for Black people in the West?



EA: No, but I can talk about it later on when I worked up there (chuckle).

JW: Okay, we'll get to that. So where did you finally sort of settle?

EA: Well, during the First World War we lived in Vallejo.

JW: Up here?

EA: Vallejo, California. My father worked at Mare Island during World War I.

JW: And I assume Vallejo was what, just a little country town?

EA: Yes. You know, Vallejo was...

JW: I know what it is now and I want to know what it was then.

EA: Yes, well it was a lot of Marines and soldiers. There was a lot of sailors because there was a naval base, you know. But they built ships on Mare Island so it was a lot of work. People came from all over to work at Mare Island. So that's what my father...

JW: At the beginning of the War you were about five or six years old then?

EA: Yes. I was born in 1910 and during the War...yes, I guess so.

JW: What is the earliest house you remember living in?

EA: Well, my first memory really I remember very good was the one in Vallejo.

JW: What was that house like?

EA: Well, we had roomers. It was a big old house and it was on 137 Capitol Street. And we took in roomers. I remember that.

JW: And your father was working at the shipyard. What was your mother doing at the time?

EA: My mother was just...she was just taking care of us, just a housewife. And taking care of the big house there because we had roomers, you know.

JW: Were your roomers of all races?

EA: They were and I remember some of them were Filipinos. I remember that.

JW: Why were they in Vallejo?

EA: I haven't any idea. I guess my mother would know better than I would. I don't know. I was pretty young at the time.

JW: What was your play like in those days? I mean, what kinds of games did you play and what did you do with your time?

EA: Well, I played...I used to play...I got interested in baseball when I was young. My father was the manager of a...they called it a colored team in those days. It was Black (chuckle)...a colored baseball team. And so he was always interested in me in sports. I got interested in sports and I played baseball and other games that kids play.

JW: What was the name of the team your father managed?

EA: I don't remember the name of the team.

JW: Was it in Vallejo?

EA: It was in Vallejo.

JW: So it was mostly War workers who were on that team?

EA: Yes. Right.

JW: I guess women didn't have anything to do with baseball in those days.

EA: No, they didn't (chuckle).

JW: Were you close to your brothers and sisters?

EA: Very close.

JW: Did you play with them?

EA: Yes.

JW: Did you play with other kids in the neighborhood or were you pretty restricted?

EA: No, we had a lot of friends there.

JW: Were you allowed to roam about at will?

EA: No, my folks were pretty strict. I mean, we had to be in at a certain time and "don't you go so far to play." And parents were a lot stricter in those days. And I had a little old wagon I used to ride down the hill I remember. I had a little cart I made where I used to coast down the hill, some of the hills there...a few small hills in Vallejo. But I didn't wander too far from home. I sold papers down at Mare Island

...The workers would come off of the a...get through at night. When I was a little kid I used to sell papers. I remember that. The Oakland Tribune.

JW: The Oakland Tribune?

EA: Yes. I don't know why it was the Oakland Tribune. It was a big paper then in Vallejo at the time.

JW: What would you do on the really hot days? Doesn't it get really hot in Vallejo?

EA: It does get real hot. We didn't do too much. We didn't go swimming, I know that.

JW: There was no pool, no beach?

EA: I didn't know of any. No.

JW: How did your mother like living there?

EA: Well, my mother liked it all right but...because we had a lot of friends and were pretty active. And they had little dances there, I remember. And they even had dances in the place I lived, I think. They had a little hall there or something. But my mother, when they wanted to really have a good time I think they went to Oakland in those days.

JW: There was no bridge running across?

EA: Oh, no, there was no bridge. There was a bridge. Yes, that bridge was there.

JW: In those days?

EA: Yes. One bridge. Two now. But they had a bridge leaving Vallejo.

JW: Did your father own a car?

EA: Yes, he did.

JW: Do you know what it was?

EA: One was a Chandler, I remember.

JW: A Chandler?

EA: Yes. (chuckle)

JW: When did you learn how to drive?

EA: Oh, I learned how to drive when I was real young. I was in my early teenage.

JW: Who taught you?

EA: My father. Because my father had a truck and he taught me how to drive the truck. And he helped me. And another friend of mine by the name of Earl Adams which was one of my best friends, he helped me.

JW: How long was the family in Vallejo?

EA: Gee, I don't remember. My mother would remember all of that over the years. I really don't know.

JW: Were there any Black families in Vallejo that had been there for a long time?

EA: Oh, yes. Yes! A lot of old timers there.

JW: Did your family associate with these people?

EA: Yes. See, my aunt lived there before we did. She brought us there. She was living there before we came.

JW: Which aunt was this? On your mother's side?

EA: My mother's side.

JW: What was her name?

EA: We called her Aunt Sarah and her last name in those days was...I think...I think it was ...I think her last name was Smith in those days. As I said, my mother would know all of that kind of background better than I would.

JW: As a little child did it bother you that there were no Black baseball players in the major leagues?

EA: I wasn't aware of it in those days. In fact, I didn't even know about the major leagues. I didn't even know the coast leagues. It was a small town and I wasn't aware of those things.

JW: What did your parents ever tell you not to do when you were young other than not wander off too far?

EA: Well, they told me...well, all of the morals, you know, not to steal and be honest and study and all and to be as intelligent as I possibly could. And they always used

to say that, you know, I'd have to learn and do things twice as hard because I was Black and we had a harder way to go. I was aware of that. They make you aware of that (chuckle).

JW: Did they spank you?

EA: Yes!

JW: Did they spank all three of you?

EA: Yes!

JW: Frequently?

EA: Well, not frequently. Just when we needed it. They weren't mean or nothing but I got my spankings.

JW: Were there children around that didn't get spankings?

EA: I don't know of any kids in those days that didn't get spanked in my day way back then. (chuckle).

JW: What kind of chores did you have to do around the house?

EA: Well, I don't know. I think my father...I know when we moved to Santa Rosa after that we had little rabbits and things and I used to have to take care of. I think we had some in Vallejo too. I'd take care of some rabbits my father was raising.

JW: What would people do with rabbits?

EA: My father was raising them to sell them. used to eat rabbits.

JW: Oh, kill them for meat?

EA: Yes. Like chickens (chuckle).

JW: What?

EA: Just like they were chickens.

JW: Did it bother you that you were raising these little animals and getting attached to them and then they were going to be sold?

EA: Well, I won't eat rabbit today. Because I did become attached to rabbits...especially in Santa Rosa when we finally moved to Santa Rosa and I really was aware of my little rabbit friends and I won't eat rabbit today. (chuckle)

JW: As the oldest child did they make you assume responsibility for the younger ones?

EA: In a way, yes.

JW: What was the difference in ages?

EA: Well, I'm two years older than my sister and about five years older than my brother.

JW: So you are relatively close.

EA: Right.

JW: Did they make a difference between what they expected your sister do and what the boys were expected to do around the house?

EA: Oh, yes. My sister, I presume, if I remember correctly, helped more my mother, you know...my mother more with the dishes and things in the kitchen.

JW: You never had to do dishers?

EA: I don't remember doing dishes, no. I did other manual chores I had.

JW: Did you have wood fires or...

EA: I know we had an oil stove.

JW: But you don't remember having to go out and chop wood and all of that stuff?

EA: No, I don't remember that.

JW: I think you would remember that.

EA: Yes, I would.

JW: So when did you move to Santa Rosa?

EA: Oh, gee, I don't remember. It was right after World War One.

JW: Did the War put your father out of work?

EA: I think maybe that's one of the main reasons we moved. I guess...I think a lot of them were laid off. I presume he was laid off. I don't remember and I know we moved to Santa Rosa because he had an opportunity to get a job in Santa Rosa in a garage.

JW: In a garage?

EA: Yes. In a garage.

JW: How did he hear about this job down where he was?

EA: Well, we had some friends that had moved to Vallejo. I think it was the Heins family that told him. I'm not sure but I know they were there when we got there. They were old friends of ours. We knew them when we used to live in Winnemucka where my brother was born and they lived there before we moved there. I think my father got some leads from those friends, I believe.

JW: What was Santa Rosa like when you moved there?

EA: Oh, it was a small little town and really, I mixed more there than I did in Vallejo. I belonged to the Boy Scouts and I went to a...I went to a...I think it was a Presbyterian church where I think I was the only Black kid that went. It was more integrated in those days.

JW: What was the ethnic background of most of the people up there?

EA: All I remember is that they were White, that's all I know.

JW: They weren't immigrants? They didn't speak any foreign languages?

EA: No. No, they didn't seem to be immigrants.

JW: So how long were you in Santa Rosa?

EA: Gee, I don't remember that either...a couple of years. My next stop was San Francisco in 1923.

JW: So in thirteen years your family had moved about seven different times?

EA: I guess so. I presume so, yes.

JW: Did that affect you in any way? I mean, you don't feel like you didn't have a home?

EA: No, I didn't because my mother was a very good...warm mother and I didn't...I hated to leave Vallejo because I had made a lot of friends but I went to Santa Rosa as a kid and I made other friends again. Then when I moved to San Francisco why I met other friends again and I became involved with kids over there. And it was really integrated over there. They had every race in the world over there. It was really...they had a lot of ethnic races in the Protrero District where we were raised...I was raised in San Francisco on Protrero Hill. And we were the only...not only the only Blacks in school but the only Blacks in the District in those days. I talk about O. J. Simpson

living on the Hill but when he moved there it was a lot of Blacks. This was way before he ever moved there. When I moved there, we were the only Blacks in the whole neighborhood and the only Blacks in the school.

JW: What school was that?

EA: Daniel Webster.

JW: You started school though back in Vallejo, right?

EA: No. Really, I started the first grade in Chicago. As a little kid in the first grade, I came to Vallejo and started the first grade again. I didn't stay there too long. We moved. I think I started right over again in the first grade again in Vallejo.

JW: And then you went up to...What kind of school was in Vallejo? Was it all elementary school kids?

EA: In Vallejo? Yes.

JW: Was it a school like today or were most of the classes in one room or what?

EA: Yes. Well, all the classes of different grades were in...No, they had different rooms for different grades.

JW: Did you ever have any Black teachers?

EA: Never in my life. Never in my life.

JW: That's from living in California.

EA: That's right. I didn't know but I didn't know they even taught school (chuckle).

JW: And what school was it that you went to in Santa Rosa?

EA: I think it was called Fremont Grammar School, if I remember correctly.

JW: When your father was in Santa Rosa, what kind of work was he doing up there? Your mother had been running this boarding house and he'd been working for I guess the government.

EA: Yes. We were over at Mare Island and he worked just as a laborer, you know, building ships or something. I don't know what he did.

JW: Then they had to pick up and start over again?

EA: And we started over again in Santa Rosa and he worked at a garage as a...just a laborer of some kind. I don't know what he did. .

JW: And what did your mother do while you were there?

EA: She was just a housewife.

JW: Did it ever occur to her to go out and work or do you know?

EA: Well, I do know my mother was ill when we were in Santa Rosa. She wasn't too well at that time and she had to come to San Francisco to have an operation, I believe. She wasn't too well at that time.

JW: But you didn't do any farming or anything there?

EA: No. No.

JW: Wasn't Santa Rosa primarily a rural area?

EA: It was, yes, but we didn't do anything like that.

JW: What did you do for entertainment up there?

EA: Well, I belonged to the Boy Scouts up there. And it was integrated. And I belonged to a local Boy Scout troop and it was...I had a lot of fun. I got along fine with them.

JW: What kinds of things did the Scouts do?

EA: Well, we used to go out on hikes and have camp fire meetings and sing different songs. You know, I learned how to sing songs.

JW: Did they have merit badges in those days?

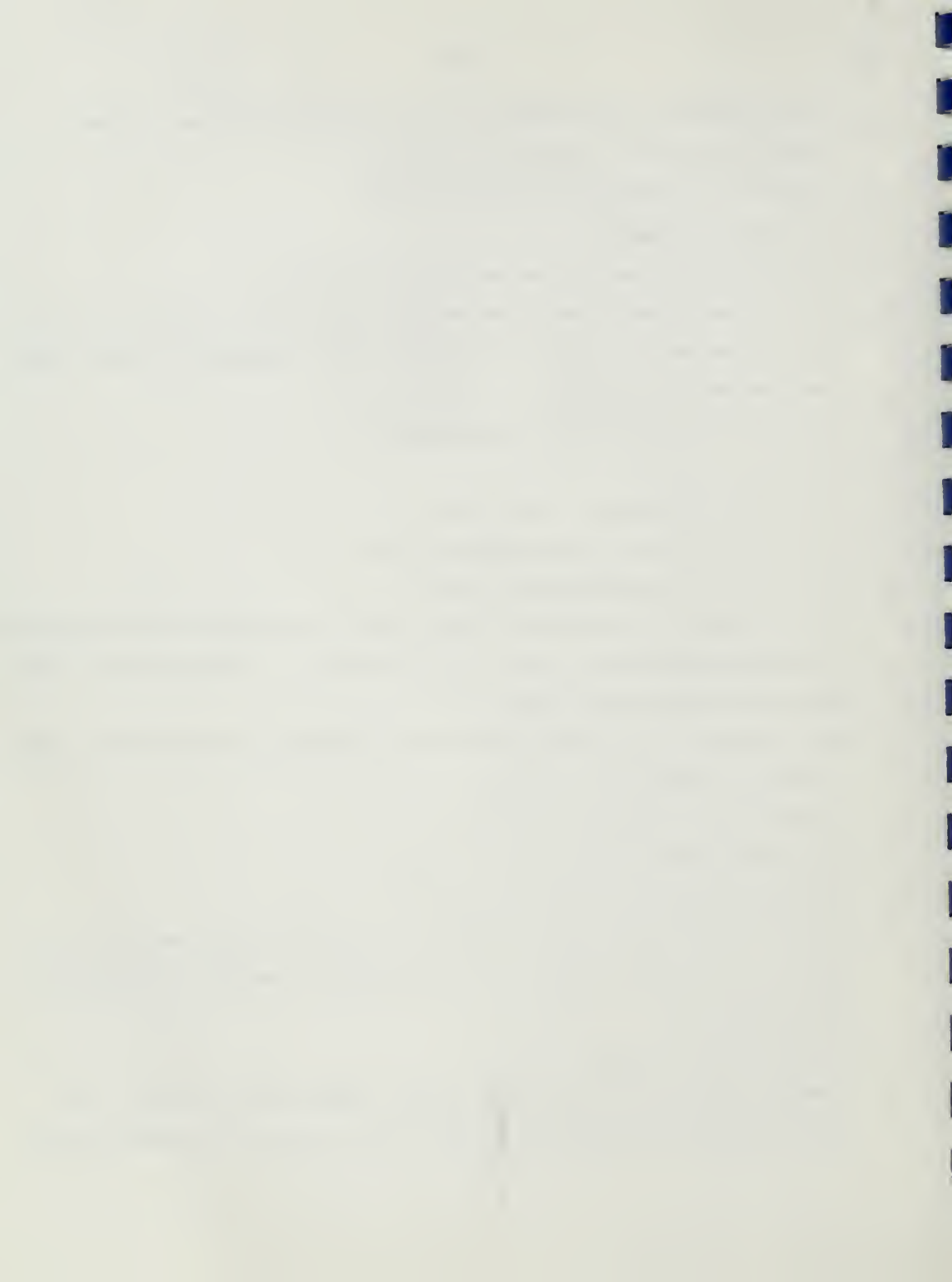
EA: Yes, they had merit badges in those days. Yes.

JW: Did you ever achieve any rank in the Scouts?

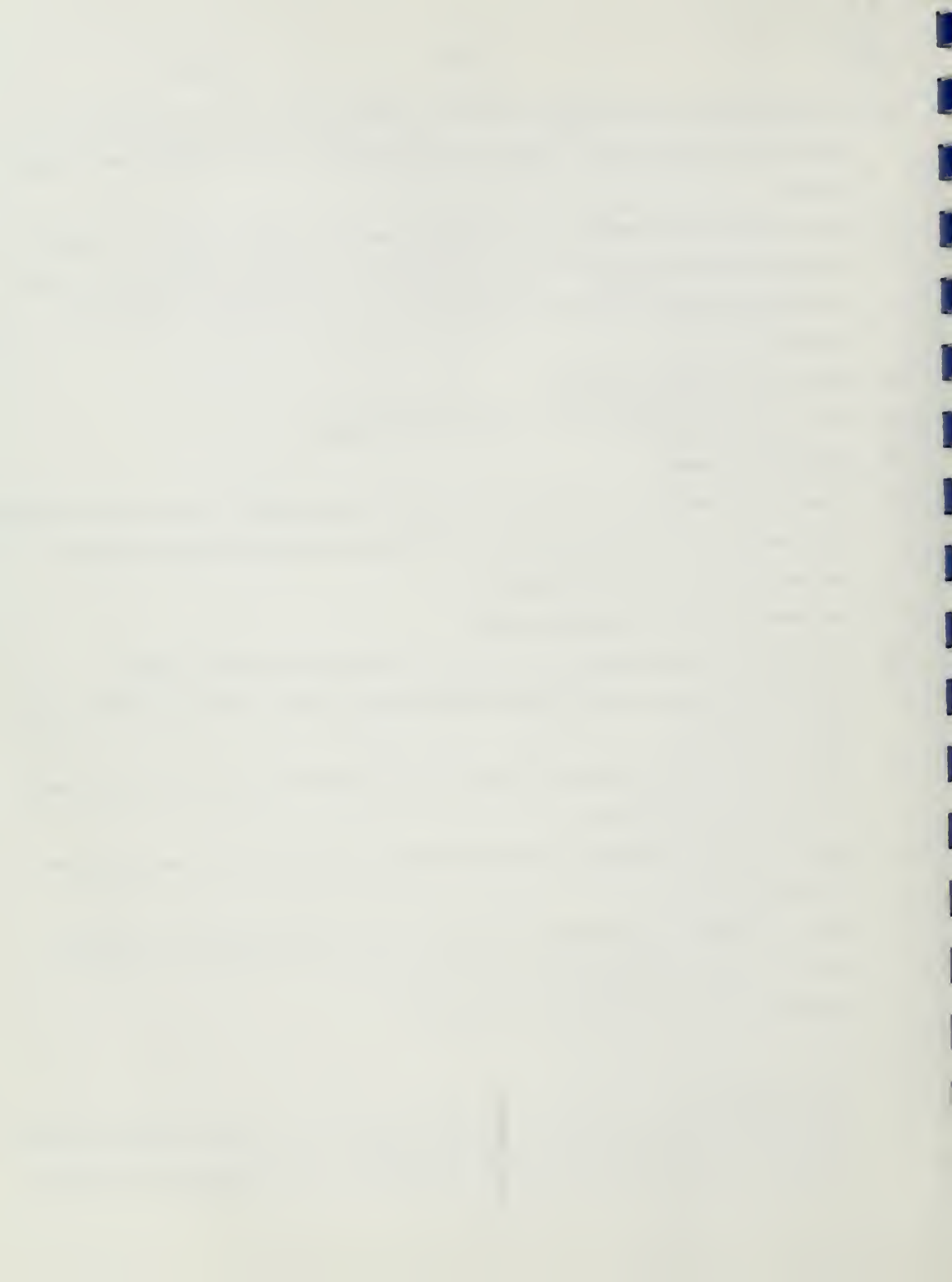
EA: I did. I was the first...I was a Tenderfoot. To tell the truth, I wasn't there too long. I would have gone higher if I had stayed there but we moved to San Francisco. I was on my way up.

JW: Were you afraid of snakes?

EA: I never thought about it. No, really, I didn't remember seeing any snakes. No, I don't remember being afraid of snakes. But I am. I don't care for snakes that much.



- JW: When you moved to San Francisco, did people consider you a country boy or did it not make that much difference? I mean, what was the impact of San Francisco when you got there?
- EA: When I came to San Francisco I had the wrong impression about city kids. I thought city kids were sissies and I was the viril kid but I found out different...that I was the square and the city kids were really the _____most kids. I found that out fast.
- JW: Why? You had to defend yourself?
- EA: Oh, I got in a few fights, yes. People called me names.
- JW: What kind of names?
- EA: Nigger. But after I had a fight with a kid and I proved myself, we became best friends after that. As I said, there were a lot of races over there...Russians, Italians, Syrians, Irish. It was really multi...
- JW: Did people all used to tease each other?
- EA: Not too much. Once you made _____ why we were just like a family.
- JW: Were other kids who were new to the neighborhood get called names and did they have to defend themselves?
- EA: Yes, they did. They called them a daggo or wop or some other name if they were that. Yes, that was all of them.
- JW: So now what was the family situation on Protrero Hill? What kind of house were you living in then?
- EA: Well, we rented. Our landlady lived upstairs and we lived downstairs on the ground floor in a little small house...in a little flat.
- JW: Now did you own that boarding house in Vallejo?
- EA: No.
- JW: You just managed it?
- EA: Yes. The first house that any of us owned in my family was me when I bought this house (chuckle). Now my mother owns a house out in Oakland. My mother~~is~~ buying her house.



JW: What was the flat like? How many rooms did it have?

EA: Where?

JW: In Protrero.

EA: I really don't remember. We didn't have a lot of rooms.

JW: Were all of the kids sleeping in one room?

EA: I don't remember. I guess my mother can give you more details on that.

JW: Okay. Did you have a nickname as a child?

EA: Just Eddie, that's all.

JW: Nobody ever attached to you some other name?

EA: No. No name like unfavorable or anything like that.

JW: How were your parents different from one another?

EA: Well, what was the difference between my mother and my father? Well, my mother was... my father was always scuffling to find a job, you know. It was hard for a Black man to get work in those days, you know, and my mother had to take care of us kids. She took good care of us. We were very well taken care of.

JW: Which one do you figure you were closest to?

EA: Well, I guess I was closest to my mother because I was around her more but my father used to take me to like when we were in Vallejo he took me to fights and baseball games. He got me started in baseball and sports. He made me aware of that.

JW: Which one was the most positive or seemed to mix best with people?

EA: Well, I'd say my mother would be more of a...let's see. I guess my mother. She was more of an extrovert I think than my father. I think my father was more of an introvert if I remember correctly.

JW: Did he entertain himself or did he go out to taverns and that kind of thing or did he mostly stay at home?

EA: Well, he liked sports and he liked hunting.

JW: Where did he go to hunt?

EA: Here he didn't have too much chance. When we lived in Nevada he used to go hunting. Where it was I don't know. And we'd go fishing.

JW: Did you like that kind of stuff too?

EA: Yes, when I went fishing with him in Nevada I liked it. Yes. I never did go hunting with him. I don't like hunting. I don't like killing animals.

JW: Was he doing it for sport or was he doing it for meat and food?

EA: He was doing it for the sport. He was a sportsman.

JW: When the family got together and the housework had been done, how did you spend your leisure time?

EA: Studying and reading, I guess. Reading books and studying. I always did all right in school.

JW: How did you celebrate your birthday?

EA: Oh, my mother would have a little cake for us, you know and she'd usually have some of the kids over to celebrate it with us.

JW: What about Christmas?

EA: Christmas, we always had a nice Christmas. We always had a little...they...they... they managed to supply us with food and toys that we needed or wanted.

JW: Did your aunt in Vallejo come down for Christmas?

EA: Well, my aunt...in the meantime she lived in...she moved to San Francisco so she was in San Francisco when we were here and she helped us a lot. She aided us. My father...during the little hard times, my aunt was a great help to us financially.

JW: What was her occupation? What was she doing?

EA: Well, she just happened to be married to a man who had a little money.

JW: What was his name?

EA: I think it was Smith.

JW: What was he doing, do you know?

EA: He was an insurance man.

JW: Selling insurance or what?

EA: I don't know. I forgot. He was a...he was a White man and he was very nice to us and nice to her and he helped quite a bit. In fact, I think he was a Mormon (chuckle). My mother can tell you more about that than I can.

JW: When you were small did you have any hopes about the future or what you would be when you would grow up?

EA: Yes, I used to think about it. At one time I thought I wanted to be a preacher, really. (Chuckle). And I changed after I grew up a little but I was kind of religious.

JW: What faith were you raised in?

EA: I was raised a Protestant.

JW: I mean which denomination?

EA: I remember my early years in San Francisco I went to the Methodist church and in Santa Rosa I went to a Presbyterian. I think in Vallejo I went to the Baptist church.

JW: Which minister did you want to be, the kind that appealed to people by emotions or by their intellect?

EA: I think by intellect. I think I would have been low key.

JW: What was it about the ministry...

EA: Well, just something good. I believed in God and everything and I just...something about me that appealed to doing something for Jesus and God. I'm a Catholic now.

JW: Was there a lot of Bible reading at home _____?

EA: Yes, we had little books to read.

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EA: When we were in Vallejo I liked dogs. I liked dogs. We had a pet dog, yes.

JW: Did you take him with you when you went to Santa Rosa?

EA: And then I had...we had another...No, I think he died when we were in Nevada but we had another dog when we went to Santa Rosa. It seemed like during my childhood we always had a dog. And then I had these rabbits I was raising. So I liked pets. I liked animals.

JW: How did your parents break the news to you that you were going to have to give up your rabbits?

EA: Well, we moved and we moved to San Francisco. And I remember one little dog we had... one little puppy I had to say goodbye to. That kind of broke me down. I think I cried over that little dog.

JW: Why didn't you take him with you?

EA: Well, we moved in San Francisco and we were living in the Protrero District. We were the only Black people in the Protrero. We were renting from a White woman that was very kind enough to rent to us in those days and I guess they weren't sure that they wanted animals, you know, so I guess my mother figured it was best not to take a chance. I presume that was it.

JW: Was there anything that was prone to make you angry when you were a child?

EA: Well, I was very disappointed once when I was in Winnemucka, if I remember correctly. Some soldiers were coming through one time during the War and I was out there waving a flag, a little flag. I was a little kid. And I never will forget this. I was waving a flag and a soldier called me nigger and called me names. I didn't understand it. I thought I was an American and I'm waving a flag and I thought because they were soldiers they were on my side. And I never...and that had a...I was very...I had...tears came to my eyes. I was really hurt.

JW: What did your parents say when you told them what happened? Were they there with you at the time?

EA: Well, I came and told them and I think they explained to me that how some White people are and I guess...I think they explained that we are at the bottom of the totem pole
and
as far as statue is concerned in our society,/ I had to begin to learn to live with that.

JW: How old were you at that time?

EA: Gee, I was just a young kid.

JW: Were you six or seven or nine or ten?

EA: I might have been eight or nine or seven or somewhere around there. I really don't remember.

JW: When do you think that you first sort of really realized what being a colored child was going to mean in America?

EA: Well, I didn't realize it too much in the Protrero District. It was kind of integrated. I didn't go with any girls or anything. There were no Black girls around there and the little White girls I kind of liked as a little kid. It didn't mean anything but I didn't know until I got a little older and got in my teenages and then I realized the kids that I was raised with, they went one way and we went a different way.

JW: Who is we? You mean your brother and sister?

EA: No, I mean the White kids went one way and the Black kids went a different way...went to their own little niche, you know.

JW: Did they invite you to parties?

EA: Well, we moved away and I got away from them and I came to San Francisco and lived in the Fillmore and I was just around Black kids then. I had White kids that we played in the park with but socially we just went around with White kids...I mean Black kids.

JW: Did your parents move to the Fillmore so that you would have more social contact?

EA: I don't think that was the reason. I think there were other reasons whatever those reasons were I don't know. I know my...I really don't know.

JW: About what time was it then when you moved in the Fillmore? Were you in your early teens?

EA: I was just about the beginning of high school, yes.

JW: About thirteen or fourteen?

EA: Yes.

JW: So it would be in the middle of the Twenties?

EA: It was around...Yes, it was the middle Twenties or something like that.because I graduated from Daniel Webster in 1925 and I was still going back there to finish my last half-year in the Protrero District. I was commuting. I finished there so it was about 1925, I think, '24 or 5.

JW: How did you feel now that you were in a neighborhood where there were more and more Blacks?

EA: Well, socially I began seeing Black colored girls in those days. I kind of liked the idea that I could^{be} part of something and I was very bashful because I was raised mostly with White kids in all my younger days and I didn't get around Black kids until I was about a teenager. So Black kids to me were a little...something to me...a little different because I was raised with White kids practically all my life.

JW: How were they different?

EA: Well...well, some of the Black kids I met talked a little different. Their speech was a little different...and not all of them.

JW: You mean they had some kind of an accent?
from the South

EA: Some of them, I guess,/had a slight accent. As I said, I was raised with White kids and at that time I didn't have any accent. And I was just...it was just a new world for me, you know.

JW: How did they react to you?

EA: Oh, well, at first I was very bashful and I was shy and I think they thought I was kind of, to use the word, the vernacula, sissy in a way. You know what I mean. And then I got in a fight with a couple of them and found out I was all man because one kid I beat up.I remember one kid I beat up pretty bad and they found out I was...I was ...I was one of the...you know, I was all right. And so I was accepted after that because I could handle myself.

(chuckle).

JW: And once you moved over in the Fillmore you didn't have any contact at all with the friends you had over in Protrero?

EA: No, we kind of got away from each other.

JW: Because, you know, Protrero is not that far apart.

EA: I still see one or two of them now though, really. There's a kid...he's in business now over on Connecticut Street and I just bought a television from him. We talked about old times. He remembers when I used to go to his house and practice and things.

JW: What high school? (This was after the machine had been cut off.)

EA: Polytechnic.

JW: Is that the one down on the edge of Golden Gate Park?

EA: No, that's out on...across from Kezar Stadium.

JW: Yes, that's what I mean.

EA: Yes. Right! Right!

JW: What made you go to that school? Did you have a particular occupational goal by going there?

EA: No, I really didn't. This is the school I decided I wanted to go to and I heard it was a good school.

JW: Where were most of the other Black kids going in your neighborhood?

EA: Most...there weren't too many Black kids in those days. But I think most of them went to Commerce. There were only about five of us out to Polytechnic when I went there at the most.

JW: What kind of course offerings did they have?

EA: It was mechanical really. How I happened to go there I really don't know because it was more for mechanics but you got a good broad education now.

JW: Did you enjoy going to school?

EA: Yes, I did. I wanted to learn. I did.

JW: What was your favorite subject?

EA: Let's see. I liked history. I was very interested in history.

JW: Did they ever give you any Black history?

EA: No, I didn't know Blacks did anything. You know, we weren't aware of those things. That's the unfortunate part.

JW: Did you go to the Booker T. Washington Center?

EA: Yes, we did.

JW: Did they ever talk about Black history?

EA: Yes, they did. They talked about Booker T. Washington and George Washington Carver and DePriest and then I began getting...I began being aware of Blacks, you know, doing something.

JW: But in the history classes they must have said something about slavery and things like that.

EA: Yes, I knew about slavery. Yes, I was aware of that. And I was aware of where my descendants came from and what happened. Yes.

JW: I mean what did they say about it?

EA: Well, they just said how slaves were brought over from Africa and how they were treated and just the way the facts were.

JW: What kind of person was usually the teacher's pet or did teachers show any favoritism?

EA: Well, I don't remember any too much in high school. I know in grammar school why they made me...I was the only Black in school and they made me the...somewhat like the president of the school. I used to have to whole yard salute the flag, all the kids salute the flag. I'd pledge allegiance to the flag so somehow I came to the forefront in grammar school.

JW: You don't know how?

EA: No, I guess...I guess...I was a good kid and I was a studious kid and I guess by my example. I don't why. I don't know how it came. I think the teachers liked me. See, I found out when you're the only Black in the school around white kids, sometimes they

do treat you better if you have a little on the ball but if a lot of other Black kids come to that school, well then things change. But when you're the only one, if you have anything on the ball at all, why you can...somehow you can forge ahead.

JW: Why do you think this is?

EA: I think it's because of...I think it's their conscious or something but I don't know. I don't know what it is. But I think they are surprised to find out that you are like the rest of the kids and that you can fit in with the rest of the kids.

JW: Did you ever read the Autobiography of Malcolm X?

EA: No, I didn't. My kids did.

JW: Well, in that book he was sort of the star too because he was^{about}/the only Black.

EA: Yes, for some reason we got along better when we were the only ones. (Chuckle)

JW: Do you have any teachers from your elementary or high school years that you remember particularly, fondly or otherwise?

EA: I remember one teacher that was very prejudice. I didn't realize it at the time. I wasn't even aware of it but I took Latin and he used to talk about Booker T. Washington is the blackest man he had ever seen and all of that. But Booker T. Washington wasn't that black. I didn't realize until later. I wasn't aware of what he looked like. And he used to make remarks and he gave me a bad mark and I had to take it over again and he showed favoritism to some of the White kids. He was the only prejudice teacher that I ran into that I thought was prejudice. But I took his class again and he passed me the second time but I knew I was good in Latin...very much prepared.

JW: What did your parents say about him when you brought this failure to them?

EA: I don't think I even told them about it. (chuckle) I don't think they were aware of it.

JW: Why?

EA: Well, at that time when I was going to high school, my mother and father were kind of separated too. My family was broken up and my mother was working hard trying to keep us...

JW: Were you living alone or did you live with your aunt?

EA: No, we were living by ourselves and my father, by the time I graduated from high school ...before I graduated from high school my mother and father were separated and so I didn't want to worry my mother with my little problems.

JW: That was a pretty big problem if you had to take it over again.

EA: Yes, I know. Yes, it was, it was, but I didn't mention it to her.

JW: What was your address in the Fillmore?

EA: I lived at 1713 Eddy Street, I believe, and the last place we lived was the 2500 block on Post Street.

JW: On which street?

EA: Post. 2583, I believe.

JW: When did you become aware that your parents were in the process of separating?

EA: Well, my father had to go down to Palo Alto, to leave town to get to work and he went down to Palo Alto to work. My mother was tired of moving (chuckle). I don't know all the details. I don't know what happened.

JW: You don't remember any arguments in the house and that kind of thing?

EA: Not too much, no.

JW: And that had a financial affect on your family?

EA: Oh, yes, because when I got out of high school why I didn't go to college. I wanted to go to college. My mother...I had good grades in high school and I think I could have made it in college. But I didn't go to college because of the fact of a broken family. And I had to work, you know, to help.

JW: This would have been just about the time of the depression, right?

EA: Well, I got out of high school in 1929. I graduated in '29, December '29, and so as soon as I got out of high school, man, I was working. My brother went to college. He came after me, five years after me. He got a scholarship, an atheletic scholarship.

JW: To go where?

EA: Sacramento Junior College. Then he went to State too, I think.

JW: Going back to high school just for a few more minutes, you like to read. What kind of stuff did you like to read?

EA: Well, I like to read history and I wasn't aware of what Blacks were doing in those days. I really wasn't. _____
but I wanted to read history and find out what happened in our world, how we derived, how America was discovered and just history. And I used to like to read Horatio Alger books where the poor kid became very successful under a lot of hardships. That was the book that made you...that gave you a little lift, you know. Here's a kid that didn't have anything and he ended up being a great guy so I used to like to read that. I guess I kind of...

JW: What were your hopes at that point, you know, when you were coming out of high school? If your parents had stayed together during the depression...

EA: Well, I wanted to go to college and be a druggist.

JW: A druggist?

EA: Yes. That's why I took Latin and Chemistry in high school.

JW: Why pharmacology?

EA: I don't know. I just wanted to be a pharmacist. I don't know why. I just wanted to be able to mix things and medicine and have a drugstore of my own.

JW: Were there any Black pharmacists or chemists that you knew of?

EA: No, later on after I got out of school I remember the first one that opened a drugstore here, Charlie Reagan. But, no, I wasn't aware of that. I didn't know of any. There were in other towns, I guess, Chicago and different places but not here.

JW: It didn't occur to you then that there would be any problems?

EA: No, it didn't. I just wanted to...

JW: How did your parents feel about that? Did you ever discuss it with them?

EA: Oh, yes. They, they, they were...my mother was just disappointed that my mother and father separated and I didn't get the...I didn't have the opportunity to go to college.

You know all I had was just a high school education and then I _____
and went to Metropolitan and I retired from _____.

JW: But you didn't...Did you ever consider that okay, this is for now but five years from
now I will go back to school or anything like that?

EA: No, it was such a hard time. We were having such a hard time economically. The
depression was on and I was lucky to get a job and fortunately I did right out of
high school.

JW: Were you all allowed to play cards?

EA: Yes, we used to play hearts and blackjack.

JW: What about drink liquor?

EA: No, I never smoked in my life (chuckle), even when everybody else was doing that.

JW: What about go to the movies or theater?

EA: Oh, we'd go to the movies. Yes, we went on weekends to the movies. We did that.

JW: Any movies that you remember?

EA: I remember the old serials in those days. We'd see a serial and the next week we'd go
and see how this guy escaped from getting killed (chuckle).

JW: Do you remember StepinFetchit and those kinds of movies?

EA: Yes, yes. That used to make me feel bad. They were all stereotyped and the Negroes
always portrayed somebody lazy and shiftless. I guess that's why I tried to be just
the opposite to show people...I always tried to show people I'm the same as they are,
you know what I mean? But I wasn't embarrassed by that.

JW: Did you go to the live...the stage theater?

EA: Yes, I went to the Prince Theater where they had vaudeville. I had a couple of friends
who were in vaudeville.

JW: Who were they?

EA: One cat I went to school with...Charlie Weaver and Bobby Evans.

JW: Did women go to these kinds of shows as well as men?

EA: Sure. _____.

JW: Did you go to serious drama?

EA: On the stage?

JW: Yes.

EA: I don't remember. No. I did go to the Orpheum Theater which was a high class vaudeville theater in those days...the highest.

JW: Did you see people like Duke Ellington and these people when they came here?

EA: Oh, yes, because when I first came here the music was what I got interested in and I finally became a musician. And, oh yes, I went to see Duke Ellington and any musical star that came to town I tried to see. I remember seeing Bo Jangles in "Strutting Along" or something. I've forgotten the name of it but it was a Black musical. I remember seeing that and I was very aware of the Black musicians. In fact, I guess those were the only ones that were doing well in our society was entertainers.

JW: How were you aware, through records, through hawking or what?

EA: I guess through records. See, when I got out of high school I got a job at Topsy's Roost. I used to see people. I was going in the night. I used to play phonograph records. Set my drums up and play phonograph records with my drums until the big bands came at nine o'clock. And it was a White band naturally and I could see how they lived. I worked all of those hours and they made three or four times more money than I did and they dressed nice. We had to wait on them and give them their food so I thought I wanted to be a musician, you know. I could see the difference. Here I had to _____ one of the first things when I came to work. I had to do a lot of little chores and I'd see the people. And I did a lot of little things. I sang with a White band, a couple of them. You know, I got in good with the White musicians and I used to sing a couple of songs with them.

JW: What kind of songs?

EA: Oh, Sweet Sue and just ordinary songs. Sweet Sue was one of them I remember.

JW: What was Topsy's Roost?

EA: Topsy's Roost was a chicken shack and had all Black help. They had a big window out in front. They had a big Black lady cooking chicken and you could see the Black cooking in the window and the dance floor inside and they had and they had slides from upstairs and you could slide down on the floor from both sides. And it was really one of the top places in San Francisco at that time.

JW: Was it named for Topsy, the character in Uncle Tom's Cabin?

EA: Yes. I guess it was. It had those little caricatures and things like that. That's why they had Black help.

JW: Something like Sambo's restaurants?

EA: Yes. That's why they had Black help.

JW: Was it Black owned?

EA: Oh, no. George Whitney owned it, the White man that owned the beach. No, we were lucky to be working (chuckle).

JW: Did you just accept that as just the way things were?

EA: Yes, we did. I did accept it the way it was. I was just trying to do the best I could and make it the best way I could and try to get somewhere to the best of my ability.

JW: Were there no Black owned resorts, hotels or entertainment spots that you remember?

EA: Well, right next door to it there was a gentleman by the name of Mr. Whittfield had some kind of a little place a few doors up there. Mr. Whittfield had some kind of an eating place. I've forgotten what it was and I was proud of him.

JW: Because that was about it?

EA: That's it (chuckle).

JW: What kinds of things before you got this job at Topsy's...

EA: I shined shoes when I was in high school.

JW: Where?

EA: At Geary and Larkin everyday after school. That's why I didn't do anything in

athletics because...I would have been a good athlete but I had to shine shoes after school to make it. And the coach came to see me at one time and he said, "Can't you run for the track team?" I said, "No, I have to shine shoes." You know, I was making I think a dollar a night...a dollar a day, plus tips. In those days that was making it. And then so I didn't do anything in school. They said I had to work everyday after school.

JW: Did you consider at that time that your experience was typical of most kids or did you feel that you had been in some way deprived of something?

EA: Well, because of my mother and father's separation--my mother worked very hard--that that was one of the reasons. Then I was also aware of that Blacks just had a hard way to go. I became aware of that fact because other kids got jobs other places and I had to shine shoes (chuckle).

JW: But this was a depression which meant that a lot of people were out of work.

EA: A lot of people were, yes, out of work.

JW: What do you think if you had to change this part of your life, do you think that you would have done differently if you had to do it over?

EA: No, I think I did the best I could under the circumstances. See, I wanted to go to college and I wanted to be a pharmacist. I had higher goals but I think I did the best under the circumstances.

JW: Did your brother and sister also have to work during the Thirties?

EA: No, they didn't work. My brother was younger than me and my sister helped around the house because my mother worked...she took care of the house. But my brother was a very good athlete. He made All City of football, All City in track so he got a scholarship to junior college and we didn't need his money as much as they needed mine because I was the oldest so he went to college.

JW: Did he ever talk about people giving him a hard way to go because he was a Negro?

EA: No, he was pretty good. He was always accepted by his White kids and coaches, you know. They all liked him. He was outstanding. I mean, we were always around Black and White kids, you know. He was and I was too.

JW: What about dating? Did you date any White girls?

EA: No, I didn't and I don't think he did either if I remember. He may have but I don't remember. I remember the first girl that he ever fell for was a Black girl up in Sacramento. That was his first love as I remember and she was Black.

JW: I mean was this because of the social...

EA: Well, I think we were aware of the problems we would have had if we had gotten involved with any White girls. I think we were aware of that. I don't know if I even thought about it. I don't think I even...I kind of liked my own the best I guess, really.

JW: But there weren't Black men dating White women and you could look at them and see what was happening:

EA: No, I don't remember any. No.

JW: What about Black girls and White boys?

EA: No, I don't remember anything like that happening. No, we usually stuck to our own.

JW: Where were Black kids meeting in those days?

EA: At the community center. That was the...
...the community center there on Divisadero Street. And the church was always a strong factor in our lives. Our social activity was the church.

JW: To what extent was the Washington Center run by...I get the impression it was run mainly for teenagers, right?

EA: It was, yes.

JW: But it was run mainly by adults?

EA: It was.

or say-so

JW: Did the teenagers ever feel that they should have more control/over what was happening?

EA: No, we didn't think that way then. Kids think that way more now than we did then I would say.

JW: Do you remember them ever telling someone they weren't welcome at the center?

EA: No, I don't. They tried to help all of us kids.

JW: There was no bad crowd of people that you had to sort of steer away from?

EA: No, in those days it wasn't too many Blacks here and it wasn't too many bad ones.

I mean, I knew every Black in San Francisco in those days. Blacks didn't start to coming to San Francisco until after World War II when all of them came to work in the shipyards. But before that, we kind of...all the kids were about on the same level, same standards and it wasn't too many bad ones or nothing like that. It's not like it is now. It was a little different atmosphere altogether. It was just a few of us and we were all about the same.

JW: Even with that small amount of people, usually _____.

EA: There might have been a couple of bad ones from outside but they kind of fit in and we tried to help them, you know. I don't think we kept any of them out.

JW: What kind of things went on at the center?

EA: Oh we had dancing and social activities.

JW: How did people feel about jazz?

EA: Well, they all loved it. In fact, I did expressly, you know, because I got into music later on.

JW: There were no criticisms of it being...you know, sometimes when people who were more attached to religious music didn't particularly care for jazz?

EA: No, no. We welcomed jazz.

JW: Was there anything that kids were doing in those days that they considered mischievous or people were doing on the sly?

EA: Well, on Halloween sometimes I'd go and ring a doorbell and stick a toothpick in a doorbell and run or tie two doorknobs together with a piece of string. That was the most mischievous thing we did in those days which is nothing now (chuckle). In fact, some White kids and I used to do that. In fact, one of the kids I used to do that with works for this automobile salesman at Army and South Van Ness. One of the owners is a Black man and this White friend of mine works for him. His name is David and he's a car salesman. And we used to do things like that.

JW: But people didn't try to go out and sneak a smoke or sneak a drink?

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EA: Well, we used to drink a little wine and I never did...was interested in smoking. I think I tried it once and I started to crying. Tears started coming out of my eyes and I began choking. So I never got over the hump. So that was the end of smoking for me. And I was real bashful. I didn't go out with girls, take a girl out, gee, I was about twenty-one years old (chuckle). My mother was a little worried about me for a while I was so bashful (chuckle).

JW: What about most of the other guys, when did they initiate their contact with girls?

EA: A little younger. I know my brother, let's see, I'm just five years older than my brother and I think he went with girls before I did because I was working so much and involved and I worked nights so I didn't have the contact with kids like other kids. When I got out of high school I had a night job. When all the parties were taking place I wasn't able to go to them so that kind of kept me away from, you know, all the young girls and things.

JW: What were people saying about what's going to happen in their situation, you know, here the Blacks owned very few properties and ran almost no businesses here?

EA: Well, we weren't aware of it because the fact is that we could go any place we wanted to eat. We could go any place and was accepted but the problem was in work. Yes. People say there wasn't any prejudice or nothing. No, there wasn't any prejudice on the surface because we could go any place. It wasn't like the South. We could go any place to eat, we could go any place. We could go and do anything that White people did but when it came to work, we had to find a spot...with Southern Pacific or Topsy's Roost which opened up or one or two other places that hired Blacks and that was the problem...finding work. That's why most of us Red Capped a lot. I Red Capped and

did everything.

JW: Well, did people talk about let's leave California and go somewhere where we can find things like that?

EA: I never heard of that, no. We didn't think about that. We liked California. We liked it here and we didn't think about that. We weren't aware that it was any different any place else, I don't think.

JW: Weren't the newspapers carrying in the Twenties and Thirties things about the Klan in the South and that kind of thing?

EA: Yes, but we didn't want to go to the South. We thought this was heaven compared to the South so that's why we didn't think about going any place else. We thought the South was really taboo. I didn't think I would ever see the South because I was aware of that, yes. I was aware of lynchings and things like that and I thought the South was hell, really, because they were really treated, from the newspaper clippings, terrible. And it wasn't that way here because we mixed with other people here and other races and our friends were White. Everything was all right here except when it came to looking for a job.

JW: What about the relationship between the Negro community and the Chinese and Japanese community?

EA: We got along great with the Japanese. The Japanese and the Negro got along great. I always had a good relationship.

JW: What about with the Chinese?

EA: I don't...I find them a little bit more prejudice than the Japanese were in those days from my personal experiences.

JW: Toward Blacks or toward all non-Chinese?

EA: I think they were more pro-White. Put it that way. A Japanese, if we were in a restaurant and a White fellow came and said he didn't allow Blacks to come in there and eat, the Japanese would say, "If you don't like it we will go some place else to eat."

They were very independent. So I was kind of pro-Japanese.

JW: Did you have friends who were Japanese?

EA: Yes, I had a couple of friends who were Japanese. I didn't run around with them but we were friends, yes.

JW: So what happened to you, you left high school about 1930 to take this job?

EA: At Topsy's Roost.

JW: How long were you there?

EA: Oh, maybe a couple of years and in the meantime I had gotten into the music racket because while I was at Topsy's Roost I began to be interested in playing the... Well, I got interested in playing the drums when I was in grammar school. To go back to grammar school at Daniel Webster, they had a contest for musicians and I wanted to be a drummer so they had a contest to choose who was going to be the best drummer and who was going to be the drummer in the band and I won easily. I hadn't ever had any lessons or anything. I guess like they say, "We all got rhythm or something." (chuckle). But, anyway, I won. And by winning I was awarded a few free lessons on how to play drums. But when I went to high school I didn't do anything. I was so busy doing studying and shining shoes and working, I didn't get involved with any activities in high school. So when I went to Topsy's Roost after I got out of high school, I kind of got interested again. I had a friend named Weseley Peeples. He's the one that really got me started in that music. And I began playing at parties and at Topsy's Roost, as I said before, I used to play the drums with the phonograph records until the big band came. And people would dance.

JW: Was this _____.

EA: Well, the whole set. I used to have the whole set out there with the phonograph records. And then I found out the union said in those days, "Well, you got to get in the union." And so I...to get in the union you had to pass a test so I had to study a little so I could read enough to take an examination to get in the union

which I did qualify for. I'm a lifetime member now, by the way. You have to be in forty years to be a lifetime member. I got my lifetime member card. But in those days I got interested in music. And I found out that's the only way...I thought that was the only chance I had a chance to get work. So I'd play for little parties and then I'd play at what they called Club Alabam where you'd get three dollars a night and you could eat and I was doing all right.

JW: Where was this club?

EA: It was on Polk Street.

JW: Was it primarily for Blacks?

EA: It was primarily for Blacks but Whites used to come in. You know, in those days, Whites used to come and visit Black people and they would join in with their culture and things like that, you know. And so they had a small White clientele but it was primarily for Blacks.

JW: With a name like Club Alabam with nobody here from the South, what was that? Appealing to stereotypes?

EA: I guess so. I think some of the fellows that owned it were originally from the South though.

JW: Going back a little bit in this shoe shining thing, was there any kind of...

EA: I worked for a Black man who was one of the most wonderful men I've ever met in my life. A man named Mr. Russell and he was like a father to me and he would see that I wouldn't do anything wrong, that I was right. In fact, he trusted me to take care of... he went on vacation once and he told me to take care of his business while he was gone. I think it was during the school vacation and when he returned, I gave him the money I had made for the week and he was so surprised. The fellow he had put in charge before that came up with half the money I did but I wouldn't...I was very honest. He could see that I was honest so he took a liking to me and he was also instrumental in me getting into the Masons later on because he knew I was...He thought I was the right caliber or the right type of person to be a Mason.

JW: How did you originally meet him?

EA: Well, I knew Mr. Russell...How did I meet Mr. Russell? I knew a couple of his kids. I don't know if I met him at church or not. I don't know. I knew he had this shoe-shining place and I asked him for a job when I was a kid in high school. I don't know how I first met him.

JW: Oh, he had kids.

EA: He had stepkids.

JW: Did you have to do any kind of...put on any kind of little show?

EA: No, he wasn't that type of a man. He was a very proud Black man and he didn't want no Uncle Tomming or nothing like that. In fact, if anybody got out of line, he'd be the first to tell them. Tell them off! He wasn't any Uncle Tom. He was a good man. And he instilled that in me. So we didn't do anything like that, no.

JW: Who were your favorite musicians?

EA: Way back in those days? Well, I guess Earl Hines and Duke Ellington and Louie Armstrong.

JW: Did you ever get to meet any of these people personally?

EA: Oh, I met Duke Ellington. I never met Louie Armstrong. I met Earl Hines and I met a lot of big time musicians after that because I played for Billie Holiday myself.

JW: Oh, you did? What was she like?

EA: She was...she was...I liked her. I didn't like the movie. I didn't like the movie at all.

JW: Lady Sings the Blues.

EA: I didn't like the movie at all because many of those things in her life did happen but she was a very pleasant and...The movie was so depressing that you wouldn't think she was ever happy, wasn't pleasant, and she was. You know, she...I liked her. I worked with Sonnet King, a fellow by the name of Sonnet King in those days. And I worked for Billie Holliday.

JW: What period are we talking about now? The Forties?

EA: Yes, the Forties.

JW: Was she working out here at the time?

EA: She was working out here at a night club. Oh, I never did travel. In fact, I had a chance to travel but I worked for Billie Holliday and I was working with a fellow by the name of Sonyers King who made some records but I wasn't on the records because somehow I wasn't available at the time or something but he made records. He became... he was a big name in San Francisco and I won't go into his personal life but somehow he never...he passed. So then when I was playing for him I always...I had...my intentions were to get a band of my own which I did later on and I played for a lot of big men in my life. I played for President Kennedy, all the celebrities, all the politicians in San Francisco. In fact, I'm playing for John Molinari on Thursday at Trader Vic's. I play for their annual fashion show every year. And I think I was one of the first Black contractors but I play for the...have you ever heard of the _____ Horse Show?

JW: Yes, from Austria?

EA: Yes, well, I was in charge of that for about five years where I had to furnish musicians. I didn't play. I was the contractor for about five years...I contracted and played for that. I played for President Kennedy, not when he was president but while he was running for president. That's when he was campaigning for President. And I played for Alioto, the former Mayor. I played for Diane Feinstein. She is the Supervisor. I don't know if you know who she is and I played for Peloisi. And I've played for all the Black clubs in San Francisco at one time during the Forties. My name was the number one...I was the number one band leader in San Francisco.

JW: What was the name of your group?

EA: Eddie Alley and the Gentlemen of Rhythm. I still got one of my cards upstairs. That's what I still go by. I'll give you one of my cards before I leave (chuckle).

JW: But the music business, I guess, was not going to be enough to live on.

EA: Well, what happened, when I got out of school though, I worked in...after I left Topsy's Roost I worked in San Jose for about a year. I worked in Reno. I'll tell you the experience I had in Reno which was a sad experience in those days in 1940. I went to the pool hall and was shooting pool. The guy said, "Make this your last game." In fact, we had to live in a Japanese hotel in those days. There was no place to eat, you know, and hardly any place to live in Reno in those days. You couldn't go into gambling joints in those days. That was in the early Forties and Reno was like Mississippi and it was really...So I used to go and play tennis. I liked tennis and we used to play tennis at the University of Nevada with some other guys who were musicians. Then I played in Reno and I played in Sacramento at a Black night club, one of the biggest night clubs in Northern California at that time. Eureka Club was the name of it (chuckle). I played at the Eureka Club and then I came back here and I was still playing music and I think I began forming my own little band. And I got a job...I wanted to...I could see I wasn't getting any place in music where I could save money and put money away, you know, really establish any routes. So I wanted to get something so I got a job Red Capping down at Third and Townsend. Then a friend told me about a job in the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. That was 1938. So I went to the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. They wouldn't hire you as a clerk in those days...only elevator operators or the kitchen. They had a kitchen in those days because they used to serve all their help food. And so I went down there and there was an elevator job open so he said, "Fellow, you can have this job if the uniform fits" and so he got me in the uniform and the uniform looked too big and I'd hold it this way and then I'd turn around and hold it this way. (Chuckle) And I said, "The uniform fits perfect." So he said, "You know you're never getting off the elevator because you're colored." I said, "Well, all right. I needed a job." This was 1938 and I got a job at Metropolitan. So I said, "That's all right, I need a job." He said, "You have a job as an elevator operator" and I said, "Fine." "But you're never getting off the elevator," he said. They didn't hire Black in clerical in those days, you know. It so happened that I became the first Black clerk there at Metropolitan

they ever had.

JW: When was that?

EA: Let's see...a storekeeper in the commissary was a clerical job and that was 1947 and I broke the ice.

JW: How did that happen?

EA: Well, any job I ever had I always did the best. I ran the elevator and then I was a janitor. I washed windows, cleaned toilets, but whatever I did I always did a good job. And I impressed the president, the vice-president that was the head man. He was in charge of the whole Pacific Coast, eleven Western states. The only man higher than him was back in New York, a man by the name of Mr. North. So one day I went to see Mr. North. I didn't think about going to Personnel but Mr. North was the boss. And he was the boss! He let everybody know he was the boss! So I went to Mr. North and I said, "Mr. North," I said, "I know it's not the custom" but I went to school with a lot of these kids that I was working with down there because I graduated with them and they started way before I did. We got out in Twenty-nine and I didn't start at Metropolitan until Thirty-eight, ten years later because I couldn't get a job down there. And so I went to school with a lot of these kids and I named a lot of the kids. I said, "I know it's not the custom of Metropolitan to hire colored people in the clerical end." I said, "I know I'm capable." I said, "I went to school with..." and I started naming the different kids I went to school with and I said, "I'd like to have a chance at it." And I said, "I don't know what to do, Mr. North, so I thought I'd come to you." And I said, "What would you do if you were in my place?" So I threw it in his lap. So he said, "You did the right thing, Eddie." I said, "Oh, I'd like to get in the clerical end." So he said, "I don't see why not." So he sent me to the personnel manager. The personnel manager said, "Eddie," and he patted me on the back, "You're a great guy, Eddie. You're a fine man but the time ain't right yet and maybe if you did that maybe most of the clerks would walk out and we're not ready for something like that yet."

JW: And this was only two years after they had been talking about Hitler's racism.

EA: That's right! And so I went to the personnel manager and he told me how much he liked me and all of that. So I went back to Mr. North and he said, "What did he say?" I said, "Mr. North," I said, "Mr. McDowell didn't give me any satisfaction." So he called up Mr. McDowell and he...and Mr. McDowell was scared because this man, as I said, was really...he was like John L. Lewis. He said, "I'm sending Eddie Alley over to see you about getting a new job. I hope you don't give him a run around." And that's when I got my first job. So I went back to see Mr. McDowell and he got a job for me right away. "Oh, no, I won't give him the run around. He came to see me but blah-blah-blah." So I went back to him and he gave me this job as a storekeeper in the commissary.

JW: How did the other people you were working with react to it?

EA: Oh, my boss liked me. He was an old man and he was from the old school. He liked anybody that's competent and he was very fair. He said...he had an assistant. He was the big man and he said that he wished I had started with him earlier because he doesn't like his assistant which was a White fellow. He said he wished I could...he was ready to retire and so he wished I had started with him earlier. So when he retired, another fellow took over and I could see...he changed my whole job. I used to order and I had a desk and a janitor used to come down and sweep the storeroom. And when this new fellow took over, he gave me a broom and I had to do my own sweeping...sweep the storeroom. And he took a lot of the...he took the logging job away from me. I could see he was demeaning my job and so I knew I was going to have to get out of there so I asked for a transfer. So I went to the Industrial Arts Division. That was the payroll division and that was a tough division. I was in my...I guess I was about forty. Let's see, Industrial Artist, 1954, and I was born in 1910. I was in my forties, you know. And going on the job like that was tough. This was the payroll division. I had to know how to work calculators and machines and there was a lot of math involved and a lot of work that...I had been out of school so long it was hard on somebody my age just

learning that but I did all right. I stayed in there for a while. I stayed in there. I had trouble there too. See, I only stayed there about a year but what happened... I stayed there a couple of years...I became an audit clerk and to get promoted to control clerk you had to take an examination and that examination took a half a day practically. So I took it and I passed it. A couple of other White kids didn't pass but my boss up front never did like...didn't want me in that division. I was the first Black that was ever in this division and he didn't like the fact that the big boss put me in there, you know what I mean? So he really made it hard for me. I needed all the help I could get. It wasn't easy. I needed all the help I could get. So I had a couple of White friends that were really my friends so I'd go and ask them a question once in a while, you know, about something I didn't quite understand. They were very patient because they knew I was struggling and I'm forty years old and been out of school all of these years and this is a whole new field and it was hard. But I took the examination and I passed. But when I'd ask this kid a question, one of the other bosses up in front called me up one time and bawled me out. He said, "Don't ever go and ask him anything. If you want to ask something, see me." But everybody else went to him. This kid was the smartest kid and everybody else went to him and I was there only one minute asking this kid a question and another White kid went to ask this kid a question and I timed it. It was fifteen minutes and this guy didn't say anything to him. And I knew the figures were stacked against me. I knew it! I knew I was going to have a hard way to go in there and I began to get worried so I asked for a transfer. So I became a receiving clerk then later on I became the head receiving clerk. But while I was the receiving clerk, the fellow that was my boss upstairs, not my big boss but the kid that bawled me out,...he was the straw boss or whatever you want to call it. I've forgotten his title. He said, "Eddie, I was sorry I had to give you a bad time up there." I said, "Well, why did you then?" He said, "I got orders from the front. He never did name who it was but I knew. I never did cry prejudice

you know, because you don't like to do that but I knew it was. And he said I was sorry and his conscious must have been bothering him and he said he was sorry that he gave me such a bad time but he said that his boss up front, whoever he was, told him to make it rough on me. And on a job like that, it was too much of a handicap for me to overcome because when you're young and right out of school but here I am forty years old and then getting pressure from something like that too, you know. So that's why I asked for a transfer. This young fellow this fellow told me he died a couple of years later. But I realized then that it was really prejudice. Because you don't like to say anything. I never did tell anybody...never did cry. I just asked for a transfer and got out because, you know...Then I became receiving clerk and there was some Whites _____. And then I went to ...had other jobs and I ended up as a supervisor in the mail room. I had twenty people under me...White women and Black guys. I had everything. I had twenty people under me when I retired.

JW: When did you retire?

EA: In 1976. January, 1976, two years ago.

JW: Did they ever suggest that they might put you in sales, isn't that where the real money is made?

EA: Well, I didn't want that then. I thought it was too late and I was kind of old and I was doing all right as it was. I was playing my music. And in the early part of the years I was a Red Cap. I Red Capped for about twenty years in conjunction with what I was doing with Metropolitan. And I was making all right and I didn't want to get out in the field. It was too late then. I asked for that earlier my career at Metropolitan but it wasn't open then because it wasn't any Black salesmen or insurance-men so when I didn't get it then, then later on I didn't want it really. I didn't want to go out in the field. It was too much of a hassle.

JW: Did people in the community consider...What was their feeling about musicians in general? Did they think you were living the high life?

EA: No, because they all knew me. Everybody knew me all my life and knew what kind of a

guy I was. Some musicians that I knew that...in those days nobody knew about pot but musicians and I knew kids that smoked pot, you know, in those days way back and they would sniff coke, you know. But I always kept myself in such a way that I never got involved in any of those things so I was always accepted by the best. I was kind of a society band, anyway. I played for the Ebony Fashion Show every year too by the way now. You know, the traveling Ebony Fashion Show. And so I was always accepted like a society band leader. I wasn't one of those...I suppose I was I guess a better type musician, you know, I guess. Not trying to bragg but I played for the better people. I played for the better clubs. Even the Black clubs, I played for the best social clubs and the White people I played for were politicians and people of that type.

JW: What were the best Black clubs in the Twenties and Thirties?

EA: Well, one of them was my club. I belonged to a club that started in 1933. The _____ Club. I guess Willie Brooks told you about that, didn't he? I'm a charter member. He wasn't a charter member. I'm a charter member. And the _____ D. M., my wife's club. That's older than our club. That started in 1920 something. The _____ D. M. I still play for them. I still play for my club. Some other clubs I don't play for because I don't play rock and I'm kind of...I play for an older group, you know, and I don't try to because that's not my thing. I'm not going to mess up. Why do something I can't do (chuckle)? So I play for most of the older social clubs but in those days it was the _____ D. M.'s, _____, the Aspiring Models and the...

JW: The what?

EA: Aspiring Models. And...

JW: What were the Aspiring Models?

EA: Well, I think they taught the girls how to walk and model and things like that. And, oh, a couple of other clubs. I can't think of their names.

JW: The Cosmos?

EA: The Cosmos is one of the oldest but I never played for them. That was way before my time. I went to the Cosmos when I was a kid but I never played for them and they kind of went out after that. But after the War a lot of these new clubs sprung up and one of the big clubs was the...(he yells to his wife in another room, "Hey Dorothy, what club was it that the undertakers...this undertaker's wife wanted you to join?" "The Thirteen Charms.") The Thirteen Charms. I played for them, the Thirteen Charms. And I can't think of all the clubs.

JW: What did the U _____ Club do?

EA: It's just a social club and we do have a...We furnish money for...We have a scholarship every year that we give few bucks to needy Black kids that need books and things like that. We hooked up with somebody connected with State University.

JW: I mean, when you get together, what do you do?

EA: Just more or less a social club.

JW: Do you play cards, drink?

EA: Well, we have picnics and we talk about...We have picnics and we do things together.

JW: Do you ever take trips together?

EA: We took a Reno trip and we used to travel in the early days and picnics and having our wives together and giving things for our wives and parties and things. Just a social club in general. It's a gang of kids. We started out...All of us knew each other from the beginning. We kind of go together and we just stayed together, more or less a social club.

JW: Was there kind of an elite within the Black community in those days? Were there certain families that were higher status than other families?

EA: Not in those days too much. I guess you talked to Josephine Foreman, didn't you?

JW: Yes.

EA: She was...Her family was pretty high. She was one of our first Black teachers, you know, here. We were all pretty close and I guess we were considered as good as any of them, our family.

JW: You never encountered any kind of snobbishness or exclusiveness?

EA: There were some kids across the Bay one time that used to call themselves the Blue Bloods. They were all light and had good hair. I remember that. You know, Blacks used to be the most prejudice people in the world like they are in Washington, D. C. They were kind of snobbish but I didn't count it too much because we mixed but they called themselves the Blue Bloods. They were lighter and had good hair.

JW: But nothing like that on this side?

EA: No. No, I don't remember anything like that.

JW: I guess I'll ask this question again. Were there people that Negroes basically did not associate with or people that you knew?

EA: Yes. We did. We thought we were the upper grade, upper class because we had jobs, you know (chuckle). We didn't have great jobs but we worked and we carried ourselves in a pretty good way so there was a little type of Blacks in town we wouldn't associate with. You know, we thought we were...you know, we thought we were...it wasn't prejudice but we didn't care to associate with them because we thought they were lower in morals and things and everything else than we were, you know. _____.

JW: Were there people involved in criminal activities as you remember?

EA: No. One of my best friends was one of the first lawyers, _____.
_____.

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EA: _____.
I've heard of police brutality. I never came in contact with any bad policemen because I never got in any trouble personally because there was a cop called, if you excuse the vernacular, "Ass Kicking Slim" and I heard he was pretty rough on Black people. And I heard that the cops could be pretty rough. They had the wrong way. You know, they would come in...

JW: What were the cops, Irish?

EA: Definitely. Definitely. I didn't know any Black cops (chuckle).

JW: Who would they be picking on, mainly young Black men like today?

EA: Well, guys around the pool hall or guys that loitered. You know, the kind of guys that are kind of off-brand doing wrong things or something like that.

JW: Were there any cases that you remember that people would bring, cases of police misconduct?

EA: Brutality? I don't. Later on I heard Goodlett got involved. You know who Goodlett is. And later~~on~~ I heard that he got pretty mad with the cops for stopping him unnecessarily and that was years later, you know, after World War II. But before that, I wasn't too aware of...because I had a lot of friends...White people that were friends of mine. At Topsy's Roost people used to come out there and I happened to know them and they were very friendly toward me.

JW: Were they on the take?

EA: Not at Topsy's Roost but I did hear they were on the take in some of the Black clubs.

JW: But in the Twenties the liquor was illegal.

EA: Yes, well...

JW: But I hear that people still managed to get liquor.

EA: Yes, they were. They were getting drunk (chuckle) so they must have been getting their whiskey. I was a little too young to be really aware of what was happening (chuckle).

JW: Well, did the people basically look up to policemen or just assume that they were corrupt?

EA: Well, I think we had a fear of policemen and, as I said, personally I had friends that were policemen that treated me nice because they knew I worked at Topsy's Roost and they came out there and then when I was shining shoes, the guys walking around there took a liking to me, you know what I mean. Some people would take a liking to me. I always got along all right. I didn't have any ...see anything like that. I think maybe Willie Brooks may have seen that more than I would have.

TW: Let's turn for a minute back to...How did you meet your wife?

EA: Oh, I was playing tennis over there at Hamilton Playground and she was going to Girls' High School and she was a cute girl as you see (chuckle). That was years ago so... She's still nice looking so you know what she looked like then. And so I started talking to her and then she asked me to sing for her. I used to sing too...to sing for her. She belonged to an organization and I sang. That kind of put me over because...

TW: What was the name of the organization, do you know?

EA: No. Can I ask her a minute? I don't know.

TW: What was her maiden name?

EA: Dorothy Edwards.

TW: And what's her family background? Is she a native Californian?

EA: She's a native Californian born here in San Francisco. Her father was from Jamaica and her mother is from New Orleans or somewhere down South.

TW: About when was this when you first met your wife?

EA: Well, we got married in 1939. I think I met her around 1937 if I remember correctly.

TW: So for about...

EA: And then when I got my job in 1938 we began to talk about marriage. I got a job (chuckle). So in 1939 we got married.

TW: So about between the age of twenty when you first started going out, there was about a seven year period when you were a bachelor?

EA: Yes, I didn't get married until I was about twenty-eight years old. You see, I'm nine years older than my wife.

TW: Was it common in those days for people to wait until late to get married? Was that considered a normal age?

EA: No, I was a little slow on everything. I was slow in meeting girls in the beginning and everything else because I had to work after school and I wasn't in the circle, you know what I mean. I think I was a little late. Most of my friends got married younger.

TW: Was any pressure put on you by your parents, by your mother?

EA: No. None whatsoever.

JW: Did you know that you wanted children before you even got married?

EA: Oh, sure, I wanted children.

JW: What plans did you have for raising them? Were you going to raise them as you had been raised?

EA: Yes. I thought I was raised prettty good. I thought she was raised pretty good.

JW: You didn't have any disagreement about how to raise children?

EA: Well, later on...no, we didn't but later on I did become a Catholic. I got out of the... I quit the Masons. You see, my wife was a Catholic. When I got married, I got married in the Catholic church but I didn't become a Catholic. We got married outside the altar a little bit because in those days a nonCatholic and Catholic couldn't get married inside the altar. So I was a Protestant and I think I became a Mason after I got married. Anyway, I didn't become a Mason until...I mean a Catholic until about 1950, I guess.

JW: Was it mainly your wife's influence?

EA: Well, her influence and when I got married I promised to have my kids raised as Catholics. So I said if I'm going to have them raised as Catholics I'm going to find out what the church is all about. And I was very biased against the Catholic church because there was a lot of prejudice against the Catholic church when I was coming up. I had a neice that had a hard time in the Catholic church and Catholic churches weren't my idea of the best thing in the world because they were prejudice. And so I took instruction in Catholicism and really this guy kind of met my needs. He gave me some discipline I needed. I'm not against any religion. My kid is a Mason now. He got out of the church and he's a Mason and that's his privilege. That's where I am. I am very broadminded on something like that but I needed the Catholic church because I needed the discipline it gave. And then I found out what it was all about and then the priest that gave me instructions, I told him about the problems I had with the Catholic Church. And boy he was for Blacks! He's the one that built that Catholic building over there on...is it Bush and Lyon Street, St. Theresa's over there. He knighted the Black people

in this community. If any prejudice came up, boy, he said that he would go to Rome or anything else to fight it because that's not the Catholic church.

JW: What was his name?

EA: Father _____. Bruno _____.

JW: Which church was it that you _____?

EA: I was married there too.

JW: At St. Theresa's?

EA: I think it was St. Theresa's. (He yells to his wife in another room, "What was that Catholic church's name, Dorothy, that we were married in?") ("It was St. Benedict," she answers." St. Benedict The Moor.

JW: This was the only Black Catholic church, right?

EA: Yes, it was.

JW: Was the congregation all Black?

EA: Yes, it was all Black.

JW: Wasn't that against the church doctrine?

EA: Well, later on...he was trying to get it together. No, it wasn't the church doctrine but he wanted to get us together and get the unit and then later on we all branched out. I'm an electorale at Mission Delores here. I don't know if you know what electorale is but I assist the priest when I am at Mission Delores. I'm the first Black president of the Holy Names Society in Mission Delores.

JW: No, I was raised in the Protestant religion so I didn't know very many Catholics.

EA: No, I didn't either. (Chuckle)

JW: We were the...the congregation was Black but everybody else was White--the nuns, the priest. So the Black community didn't have very much to say about it?

EA: No, we didn't feel like that. We felt that this is a Black church and we just felt that we didn't know so many Black Catholics other than Black Catholics began to know each other so they'd have friends because most of the Black people in this town are

Protestant and so this kind of brought all the Black Catholics together.

JW: Were most of these people Creole from New Orleans, Louisiana?

EA: I guess they were. Yes, you're right. You're right. And so...and then later on I moved from...Well, I was living here then. I was going over there taking instructions then I went down to Mission Dolores here and they told me, "You don't go down to Mission Dolores," they said, "because it's all Irish Catholic"and they said, "You're not going to get along at all." So I was down there one day and I met a kid I went to school with at Polytechnic and he told me to come to the Holy Name Society and join. That's one of the big societies there and they all accepted me. I had the glad hand and they treated me right. They worked me around the chairs. I became the treasurer and finally they worked me up and I became the president. During my time of being the president why we had the Mayor. Mayor Shelley came to our dinner and sat next to me. I told a joke. I said, "You know they told me not to come to this church because I wasn't going to get along because of all these White Irish Catholics here and that I wasn't going to be accepted." And I said, "I guess I wasn't accepted." And I was president and they all fell out laughing (chuckle). And so I'm one of the mainstays around here in the Catholic church.

JW: Is that church now a more mixed congregation?

EA: It's more...the people are Spanish now but in my day it was Irish Catholic but I got along great with them. I really did. I went on retreats with them and if anybody said something out of line, they'd be the first one to clobber them. (chuckle)

JW: Which one of the Protestant churches did your mother belong to?

EA: She's Catholic. I got her in the Catholic church. She's Catholic now.

JW: But when you were younger, was it Bethel or Third Baptist?

EA: Well, when I first came here I went to Bethel but my main church was Methodist, Zion. Zion on Geary Street. Reverend _____ church. That where as I remember my most influence of the church. I did go to Bethel too in the early days.

- JW: What kind of influence do you think the church had on the Negro community at that time?
- EA: A very stabilizing influence.
- JW: Do you think it kept people a little more complacent with conditions than they should have been?
- EA: It did. The only thing I have against the church, I think, I often thought about it later on. I think churches really should put more money in businesses. All that money they get _____
set up businesses to put people to work. But I guess church has its place but it gave us a social structure. It gave us moral guidance and it gave us a sense of being friends and comrades, you know. But it gave us as I said it had a good...mostly had a good effect upon us. I think Blacks now shouldn't put all their money in churches. I think they should put it in businesses, I mean. I look at life a little different now.
- JW: Was there any group or person in the community that was considered by our modern stance who was politically interested in protest?
- EA: No, there weren't any militants in those days.
- JW: Where did they come from?
- EA: Later on after World War II, the militants began picketing for...Audley Cole was the first guy on the streetcar. And then we picketed for Yellow Cab drivers. We didn't have any Yellow Cab drivers and like that. In fact, you couldn't get any work. There were very few places you could get work in San Francisco. Metropolitan was one of them and Red Capping was the other one and the railroads naturally. That's always been the mainstay of Blacks in the United States from way back, the railroads.
- JW: Was there any influence of the Garvey movement here?
- EA: I heard of him but not too much but way late. _____
_____.
- Blacks began protesting...After a whole lot of them came here we began getting more strength in the ballot box. There wasn't too much...Out here, we weren't influenced by too much. We were very complacent.

JW: In the early Nineteenth Century from what I've read, you know, the Black community here was pretty militant. You know, they were always up in Sacramento talking about their rights to testify in court and Mammy Pleasant took cases against the streetcars and so forth...

EA: Maybe so but when I came along it disappeared. I don't know what happened. You're right. I don't know what happened because I wasn't _____ of anything like that.

JW: So in some way it was either the war or immigrants from the South that brought on the protest struggle here?

EA: There's no doubt about it. It wasn't us natives that was here. I have to give those other people that came here credit for the militancy and for the change. I did it on the basis of my own job structure. I did the best I could but I wasn't a leader as a whole for the...Oh, I did belong to the Interracial County Council. We fought things. We tried to get housing for people. That was later on though, the Interracial Catholic Council. I was one of the vice presidents for that. So was Terry Francois. Do you know Terry. So we belonged to the Interracial Catholic Council and we fought bias but that was later on, you know. That was in the Sixties, I guess.

JW: You said that the Catholic church gave you some discipline that you needed. What did you mean by that?

EA: Well, I needed...Well, I was trained in music and I was working here and playing music and you know when you play in a night club, you meet a lot of girls and drinking and you're around it and all that kind of stuff. Well the Catholic church...A lot of people are against confession but if I couldn't handle something and I talked to a priest, he helped you and it kind of steered me right. For me, now. That isn't for everybody. You know, I'm not saying that's for everybody but it gave me...He kind of took interest in my discipline a little bit more. I had to kind of...I had to kind of come to what I was really doing, you know what I mean and it kind of straightened me out.

JW: Would you say your ethical beliefs today are a product of your parents, church, books you have read?

- EA: I think all of it. I think all of it together. My parents, my church and I bring in my own thoughts, too, and it's a combination of all.
- JW: Do you think on the religious question you are a liberal or conservative?
- EA: I think I am a liberal. I'm not the self-righteous (chuckle). It's not because I go to church I'm better than that guy or something like that or my church is the only church. I mean I'm pretty liberal. I think it's my only church for me but I don't go along in saying you're wrong because you belong to the other church or nothing like that. I'm not that type of a guy because I think everybody has a right to find what satisfies them the most, you know, and is the best for him and I think we all have different roads we take to come to that conclusion. Mine just happens to be Catholic.
- JW: Talking about the people that came in during the war, what was your immediate reaction to when you realized that thousands of Black people were coming here?
- EA: Well, I was a little against them because some of them were so bad. See, we were more ...We were more like White kids. We had a White culture and they were coming here and there seemed to be more swearing and certain words they used, "m-f" and all of that.
- JW: You didn't hear those words in your day?
- EA: No, I didn't hear it that much.
- JW: No, I said did they use those words in those days?
- EA: Black kids?
- JW: Yes.
- EA: It might have been heard of but...it was more of a...and I was embarrassed by some of them, their acting. I was really against/some of them. I mean, that's the first feeling you have of these people coming in because they weren't...their culture wasn't the same as ours. It was a different culture altogether. But they also had some people who came out here that were, you know, a lot smarter and had a heck of a background but the majority...a lot of them were...I was a little put out about them because they acted different on the streetcar. We were very polite on the streetcar. We took our

hats off. And we had a...our cultural background was a little different than what they brought here. _____.

They seemed to create more disturbances...they seemed to...they seemed to create...

The White friends I had, they seemed to irritate them by their ways. They acted different, you know, and I was kind of put out by some of them at the beginning. But it was kind of a shock and I couldn't get used to it because they were different.

And now, you see, you grow up with things...but you see them on the street and on the streetcar with nets on and we were always dressed up an neat. We had a different culture than they did and I wasn't aware of this new culture and the new things they brought. They brought a lot of things from the rural South with them here (chuckle), and their actions and the way they acted and everything and I wasn't used to it and it kind of frightened me (chuckle).

JW: Do you think your reactions were typical of other people that were here?

EA: I think so because some of them hated them. Some of the Blacks didn't like them. You can say that, you know.

JW: Did the immigrants try to integrate into the already established Black churches and so forth?

EA: Yes, they did and those that did were fine, had a lot on the ball, you know, the ones that had something on the ball had more on the ball than we had (chuckle). I found that out, you know what I mean. I'm trying to be honest about the whole thing, you know, how I felt at the beginning.

JW: What do you think is the overall impact they had, you know, on the city and on the Black community?

EA: Well, they drove a lot of the White people out of the city. You know, White people... all my friends that I went to school with don't live here anymore (chuckle).

JW: What about during the War years during the time they were really coming in here and making all of this money?

EA: Well, they kind of made it better for us to live here. In essence in the long run I think they helped to improve our station in life. But you see, at the beginning I was being honest, you know. If I told them they'd be mad for saying that but that's the way we felt but they came and they taught us how to fight and they were used to fighting and fighting for different things and we became involved in these things-- fighting for our rights and why shouldn't we have more jobs and why shouldn't we get this? We're no different from anybody else, why shouldn't we have our rights the same as anybody else? They brought more pressure on White people and by bringing more pressure on White people they helped all the Blacks, you know, in the long run as far as their status in life.

JW: What did they think of you? I don't mean personally but what did the immigrants think of the native Blacks?

EA: Well, I think they thought we were...we didn't have any backbone. I think they thought we were...here we've been here all our lives and haven't got anything, what were we doing? You know what I mean. We didn't have much get up about us which we didn't. We were very complacent. We were law abiding and complacent and we accepted what they had but we weren't militant and so, man, I guess they were kind of disgusted with us.

JW: Were these people who were professionals, people who had been to college or were these the others?

EA: No, the professionals, see, I fit in with the professional people better because at that time I was a musician and I fit in with them. It was the working class, they are the people that I couldn't get used to but the professional people, they...Well, Blacks have a society of their own too. They have the upper class and...and before they came, we only had one class. You know, we were all the same. So when these other Blacks came and we saw the poor Blacks and the rough Blacks and offbrand Blacks, then we saw the professional people too. So we kind of...we associated ourselves more with the professionals because we had more in common with them, you know what I mean. Because they acted different, they acted more like us and things like that.

- JW: Since most of these people came out of the segregated South, the Jim Crow South, they had obviously learned to accept a lot of things too.
- EA: They didn't seem to accept it. They were the ones to begin to do the fighting here. For some reason they were the fighters. It wasn't the people that lived here that caused all those changes. It was the new people that came here.
- JW: With the War itself, did you have to get drafted?
- EA: Yes, I was drafted but then they made me essential in a non-essential industry. They needed so many flunkies in Metropolitan to do manual work and I had kids so I was essential in a non-essential industry. And I was supposed to go. Gee, I missed it by one week and they changed me from 1-A to 3-A which is an essential in a non-essential industry.
- JW: Were you happy about that?
- EA: Very happy. I didn't want to go to war to be frank with you (chuckle). I didn't... I thought other people had more to fight with than I did. _____
_____(chuckle).
- JW: Have you ever traveled outside of California?
- EA: I went to Europe.
- JW: When was that?
- EA: Oh, about two years ago.
- JW: But not before then?
- EA: No.
- JW: Have you been down to L. A.?
- EA: I've been all over the United States. I drove from here to Boston. I drove from here to Miami. I stayed with Martin Luther King's mother and father.
- JW: Where? In Atlanta?
- EA: In Atlanta. I stayed with them. That was before Mrs. King got killed. We stayed at their home. And I told his father...he was dead then. Martin Luther King was

dead. I told his father, I said, "I would never have come to the South if it hadn't been for your son because your son changed it." And the South, I couldn't believe the South was like the people said it was because I got along in the South as well as I did here and better. And so I told Mr. King, I said, "If it hadn't been for your son I don't think I would have ever been in the South because, you know, the South was taboo." The South is beautiful now from what I can see. I'm not saying they don't have any problems but it sure did change. He laughed. He said, "Yes, Martin did create a lot of change."

JW: Before the Second World War were you able to travel anywhere out of the Bay Area?

EA: Oh, yes, I did. Before the Second World War...No, I think I was too hard working then. I didn't have the money. I was raising kids and I didn't have the money. I had been to L. A. and as I said, I went to school in Chicago, you know, when I was a little kid but I didn't travel on my own any place. No. It wasn't until after World War II that I went to Yosemite and Yellowstone and traveled all over the United States.

JW: What do you think the difference was between L. A. and San Francisco before the War. Oh, so many more Blacks there. I went down there, my mouth was wide open because I wasn't used to seeing so many Blacks and Blacks in businesses, you know, behind counters and we didn't see that here. You didn't see people behind counters waiting on you so I was aghast. I used to go down there and I'd see all these Black people doing things. And I never had seen so many Black people before because in San Francisco it really wasn't that many Blacks here. We were White oriented here too, you know what I mean.

JW: Weren't there people working downtown who were passing for White?

EA: Yes.

JW: That everybody knew?

EA: Yes. Yes, there was. I knew one at the Emporium but he was a nice guy.

JW: Were there any that you knew that decided to pass permanently?

EA: A couple of them kind of disappeared out of sight, yes.

JW: But they stayed in the City though?

EA: I think they did, yes.

JW: The Census seems to indicate that large numbers of people right around the Twenties after the First World War registered as Mexican who had registered as Negro or something before. They registered as Spanish, French, Italian and all this other stuff.

EA: Yes. Well, in the olden days my mother could get a job if she was Hawaiian. My mother was a little fairer than me and looked more like something else than I did. She even said that she was Hawaiian or something to get a job but she never did pass per se. But in those days sometimes it was necessary for economic reasons to say you were something else.

JW: I think it would be best to stop for the day because I don't have but about five minutes left on this side.

EA: Okay. I hope I was...

This is the second interview session with Eddie Alley recorded during the early afternoon of December 3, 1978 at 3872 - 19th Street in Noe Valley in San Francisco.

W: How long have you been retired?

A: Since 1976.

W: How has retirement affected your life?

A: Oh, I love it because, you know, I have music on the side. I have a band. In fact, I'm playing tonight. I'm playing Sunday and I'm playing the 15th and 16th and 21st. So I stay active and I got a young daughter still in high school. Few retired people have a daughter in high school (chuckle).

W: That keeps you young.

A: So that keeps me young. I stay active.

W: Has your health improved since you've been retired or stayed the same?

A: I think it's about the same. It might have improved. Yes, I think I feel better. A lot of pressure is off of me because I was a supervisor, you know, and I had a little pressure on me.

W: What are your plans now?

A: Just travel. I like to travel. My wife and I went to Europe since I retired.

W: What countries in particular?

A: We went to Holland, Germany, Austria, Paris and France, London, Rome.

W: Which did you like the best?

A: I was fascinated by Rome because it was so historic. I liked Italy. Rome fascinated me because I saw the amphitheater, you know, and all of that and I went to a little old... I saw so many historic things, you know, that I read in history...the Apian Way and all of that, you know. It brought back my days when I was in school and I was working in history.

W: Was this a packaged tour?

A: A packaged tour.

W: Where do you plan to go now?

A: The Caribbean.

W: Your mother and father were from Jamaica?

EA: My wife's rather was from Jamaica, yes. Kingston, Jamaica.

JW: Does she still have relatives there?

EA: No, because we don't know who his relatives were. We lost sight of all of those people. We're just going over there to see the Caribbean because we like it.

JW: What do you think is the secret of your being so even tempered and cheerful?

EA: Oh, gee whiz! (Chuckle) I don't know, I had four kids. We had four kids and only one of them left and you're retired too, why...I don't know, I've always been this way. I don't know what it is. I-I I've always treated people right. I've been very fortunate. I've never had many people do me in or do anything to me. I've always been friendly with people and people have been friendly with me.

JW: I don't think I got any information about your children. What are their names and ages?

EA: My oldest son is Philip. He's around thirty-eight but I don't know. I'll have to ask my wife.

JW: Did he go to college?

EA: He went to...I think he went one year.

JW: What is he doing now?

EA: He works down at the waterfront as a longshoreman and then he formed a corporation with some other fellows and they buy property.

JW: You mean real estate?

EA: Yes.

JW: And your next child?

EA: And my next child is Kenney. He's approximately thirty-five. (He asks someone in the next room, "How old is Philip?" And the person answers, "Thirty-eight.") Thirty-eight and Kenney's thirty-five--six and Stevie's twenty-eight and (daughter is nineteen). Kenney, he drives the buses and he's going back on the cable cars. He likes the cable cars.

JW: He likes that?

EA: Yes.

JW: That seems like to me kind of a fun job.

EA: And he's involved in yoga. He's very spiritual and is involved in yoga. And Stevie, 27, he works for the Southern Pacific. He has a clerical job there of some kind.

JW: Downtown?

EA: On Market Street. And then my daughter is still in high school--Lisa.

JW: What does she think she's going to do, go to school?

EA: Yes, she's going to go to college. Her last report card was an A minus average. She's on the honor roll in everything. She's the brightest one of them all according to her record (chuckle).

JW: Does she think she might go out of state?

EA: We're talking about it but she might stay right here, I don't know. My wife doesn't want her to get too far from home. She might go to USF or State.

JW: Oh, there was something you mentioned at one time about one of your neices had some problems in the Catholic church.

EA: Oh, yes. See, I'm Catholic myself now but way back in those days why the Catholic schools here were very...pretty biased and they wouldn't let her in one of the schools because the people might object if she went to that school. And Father Drexler, an old German priest, he came here and he opened up a church before I got married on Bush and Baker, I think it is. And we told him about it and he changed my whole thinking about the church. He says if she can't get into the school, he was going to write to Rome to the Pope. He was a fiery priest and very dedicated to Black people. Because he was trying to get more Black people to come into the Catholic church because he didn't feel that the Catholic church was like some summer resort where you can buy it like the Olympic Club or some of these places. And he changed things. He changed things around. And then I met a lot of Catholics afterwards. I'm a convert. I became a Catholic and I went to Mission Dolores church when it was primarily Irish. I was the only Black one around there and I became an officer of the Holy Names Society and finally became president of the Holy Names Society. I played

for dances for them and everything. So everything worked out fine. So I have a different opinion now.

W: When did you start the Gentlemen of Rhythm?

A: Oh, in the Forties, I guess.

W: During the War?

A: About that time, yes.

W: And how did you go about doing that?

A: Well, I played music before that. I got married in thirty-nine and I played music before I got married. That was my livelihood before I got a job down at Metropolitan. And so I always played in night clubs. That was my steady employment in those days before I got married. And then after I got married, after I got a day job, I thought I'd want to continue in music and I played for a couple years and I didn't like the way they ran a band so I thought I'd form my own band--my sound I wanted. And then not only that, it was necessary for me to play music because I wasn't making that much money at Metropolitan. Not and raise these kids. So that helped out quite a bit (chuckle).

W: Did you draw people out of other bands or did you get people who weren't affiliated?

A: Well, nobody was working steady around here. I heard of a fellow that was in the Navy band during the War---_____, the saxophone player. He's still with me. He's been with me longer than anybody. And then I heard different piano players and I just looked around and got what I wanted.

W: Did any of your sons ever go into music?

A: None of them. My next to the oldest son, he plays the congos a little. He was in a little band once and he played congos but he never did go into it too much--just now and then.

W: How did your brother get involved in music?

EA: Well, my brother--I think I was the influence for my brother quite a bit. I was older than him and I used to buy records way, way back in the olden days and I started to playing before he did and then he went to high school and he became a much better musician than I did. He was just a natural. He started out on clarinet and piano and became one of the best bass players in the country. He played for Count Basie and Lionel Hampton (chuckle).

JW: Was he ever in the Gentlemen of Rhythm?

EA: Oh, we play once in a while together but he don't play my...I-I just wouldn't...if there was an opening or I couldn't get my bass player or my bass player was ill, sometimes he would...but we do play together once in a great while, once in a while we play together. We started out together way, way back and then we formed a band years ago. Even before I got married we formed a band and we put Saunders King in charge of the band because we wanted a singer. But then I got married and I cut out. They stayed in music and I said I wanted a day job. I wanted that money to come in every week (chuckle).

JW: What have you got planned for me today?

EA: Music?

JW: Yes.

EA: Well, I'll have to turn it on. (The title of the tune playing is "Fascination." He plays a second and third tune, also.)





